

Lifestyle Maintenance

On steps to a healthier you one size doesn't fit all. "Make healthy food choices and be active every day" is the key message of the USDA's MyPyramid food guidance system (www.mypyramid.gov). Balancing food and regular physical activity sounds simple, but it can be a challenge. One approach is to make small changes every day that are realistic for you. These changes become habits before you know it. Making small changes in your meal and snack choices is an easy way to start.

Reaching and maintaining a healthier weight is important for your overall health and well being. If you are significantly overweight, you have a greater risk of developing many diseases including high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, stroke, and some forms of cancer. For obese adults, even losing a few pounds or preventing further weight gain has health benefits.

Reaching a healthier weight is a balancing act. The secret is learning how to balance your "energy in" and "energy out" over the long run. "Energy in" is the calories from the foods and beverages you have each day. "Energy out" is the calories you burn for basic body functions and physical activity. Here are some things to try:

- Add 1 more low-fat dairy product every day, such as an 8 ounce glass of skim milk or one cup of yogurt.
- Add 2 servings of fruit or vegetables to your meals. Try a half cup of any vegetable or a small salad at meals. Eat some fruit or fruit salad for dessert.
- Choose 3 whole grain products every day. Try sandwiches on whole wheat bread at lunch or popcorn for a snack.

Our lifestyles often include eating away from the home. Perhaps because it is easy, fast, and there are no dishes to wash. However we know that people who eat out often tend to be more overweight than those who do not eat out as much. Why? Perhaps it is because of serving sizes. The American Cancer Society estimates a restaurant provides two and ½ times for the average female needs. **Plan ahead** – Look at web sites for menus when you are NOT hungry. Look for foods that can be prepared with vegetable oil, low-fat margarine, little salt, no extra sauce or butter, and be broiled instead of fried.

Look for simple foods on the menu- It is becoming easier to find salads, fish, vegetables, baked or broiled food, and whole-grain breads on menus.

- If you don't know what's in a dish or don't know the serving size, ask.
- Order items plain, without toppings.
- Ask for substitutes. Instead of French fries, request a double order of a vegetable. If you cannot get a substitute, just ask that the high-fat food be left off your plate.

- Watch out for words like jumbo, giant, deluxe, biggie-sized, or super-sized. Larger portions mean more calories. They also mean more fat, cholesterol, and salt. Order a regular or junior sized sandwich instead.
- Order a fruit cup for an appetizer or for dessert.
- Limit alcohol, which adds calories but no nutrition to your meal.
- Skip the croissant or biscuit. Eat your sandwich on a bun, bread or English muffin and save calories and fat.
- Know that an average fast-food meal can run as high as 1000 calories or more. If you are having fast food for one meal, let the other meals that day contain healthier foods, like fruits and vegetables.
- “Sub Way” type sandwiches can be a good choice with all the vegetables added; selecting lean meats. Using spinach instead of lettuce, and selecting mustard in place of mayo. Just be careful with the amount of bread the sandwiches provide.

Eating Tips

- Eat slowly. Chew well.
- Put your fork down; visit with friends.
- Enjoy the flavor of the food.
- Think about serving sizes! Your hand is a great tool. Your palm represents the amount of meat you need; cup your hand for your vegetable servings; the end of your thumb is about a tablespoon; and your little finger tip is close to a teaspoon.
- Ask for a carry out container BEFORE you start eating. Divide the meal in two servings. Do not wait to put leftovers in the carry out dish, do it before you start eating.

Eating out can be one of life’s great pleasures. Make the right choices, ask for what you need, and balance your meals out with healthy meals at home.

People age 55 and over can receive healthy lifestyle information on high blood pressure through SenioRx/Wellness. The program also provides free prescription medicine to people that qualify. Call 1-800-243-5463 for more information or to sign up for SenioRx/Wellness. This program is a partnership between the Alabama Department of Senior Services and the Alabama Department of Public Health.